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16 November 1978

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: Airborne SIGINT Reconnaissance Review,
20 October 1978

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1. In the course of OMB's review of the FY 1979 budget submitted by the DCI to the President, it was recommended that the RIVET JOINT fleet be reduced to eight aircraft. Two were approved for modernization in FY 1979, for a total of six modernized. The President's decision on this issue was ambiguous at the time, and subsequent efforts at clarification have left considerable uncertainty. There has been provided no documented record of the President's decision, which initially was communicated only as a reduction of [] for POL. This was translated by OMB as equating to a reduction of four aircraft from the fleet of 12.

2. The Department of the Air Force informally requested unequivocal clarification of the President's decision. They were reluctant to take decisive action in the absence of definitive guidance: Was the fleet, in fact, to be reduced, or were they only to absorb a cut in POL dollars? Must the four aircraft be mothballed, or could they be placed in the reserves? Underlying the aura of uncertainty was a sense of mistrust, shared by the Air Force and the IC Staff: It was believed that the Presidential decision on the RIVET JOINT fleet had not been explicit, but that it had been implicit in his decision on a larger strategy to achieve a specific funding level. The Air Force sought clarification because they were reluctant to reduce the fleet, under the circumstances, but they were also not willing to disregard a Presidential decision. *Really?*

3. OMB finally (and reluctantly) documented the RIVET JOINT decision as follows in the Allowance Letter of 3 March 1978:

USAF review completed

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NRO review(s) completed.

Classified by []
Exempt from automatic declassification
Schedule of E.O. 11652, Exemption
Category: 55 (1), (2), (3) or (4)
Declassified

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"Airborne Collection: The President approved a total of eight, including six modernized, RIVET JOINT aircraft for 1979 with deleted airframes reallocated as the Air Force deems appropriate; a review of all airborne-related information requirements sized against available cross-service national and tactical collection capabilities should be completed if future augmentations to this force are proposed."

4. Given the events and discussions which preceded the publication of the Allowance Letter, the NSA and Air Force interpreted it as an open-ended invitation to seek restoration of the fleet in FY 1980. The first major step was to satisfy the OMB requirement for a review of all airborne-related requirements sized against available capabilities. However, the organization of a cross-service study which would encompass the full spectrum of national and tactical systems proved to be a major problem. In the absence of a single authority embracing both NFIP and IRA systems, an appropriate working group could not be organized due to Service and other vested interests.

5. In July 1978, the FY 1980 Program requested funding for 12 RIVET JOINTS and two additional modernizations for a total of eight, but the study requested by OMB had not been started. The DCI's final Program Decision Memorandum on 4 August 1978 again requested the study, and it was at that time that the CCP Program Manager established a working group. As in the past, it was primarily an Air Force effort, with the Navy declining to participate fully and the SIGINT satellite systems excluded by a combination of compartmentation and a general assumption that the SIGINT satellites could not be considered seriously for combat support.

6. The product of the working group is the Airborne SIGINT Reconnaissance Review, dated 20 October 1978. The Review reflects the short time devoted to its preparation, and the Air Force bias of the working group's membership. The review is a superficial and incomplete digest of already existing data. There is no new analysis to fill the gaps in the previous studies. Of even greater concern, the review does not acknowledge the various conflicts which impede analysis of the airborne reconnaissance issues. In sum, the review is a minimal effort to produce a document which reasserts a position; there is no attempt to resolve long-standing issues, nor any new efforts to fill the analytical voids. Specific examples are as follows:

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- o Requirements. The review discusses the signal environment in descriptive terms with no analysis of how it relates to specific information requirements. The reader is left with the implication that there is near or complete congruency between requirements and available signals. Information handling and dissemination capability is acknowledged as a basic limiting factor, but there is no analysis of this problem. NSRL requirements are described, as are types of available information, but there is no analysis relating resource levels to degrees of requirements satisfaction.
- o Application of Resources. Airborne resources are simply described in terms of existing and "available" resources, with no analytical basis for the numbers, types, and frequency of missions.
- o Overhead Systems. The review dismisses in-depth treatment based upon "classification limitations" and a vaguely stated, unsupported assumption: "...there are too many questionable factors of survivability, timeliness and availability to enable a judgment on the appropriate role of satellite sensors in response to wartime SIGINT requirements."
- o Force Mix Considerations. The review cites the difficulty of establishing a methodology, but accepts as significant the obvious fact that resources will always fall short of total satisfaction of requirements. The review's answer seems to be that maximum exploitation of the environment is required to meet minimum requirements: because the signal environment is much denser during wartime or crisis situations, the collection resources should be increased accordingly. (This seems to be an analytical inversion of the proper approach, which would seek to minimize exploitation of the environment to achieve the maximum satisfaction of requirements; and this should be an increasingly productive effort with constant resources, given a richer signal environment.) The entire issue is dismissed without any kind of analysis which would seek to optimize our collection resources in terms of either quantity or technological adequacy. The concluding discussion of Service resources, their uses and potential interoperability is simply descriptive, without analysis of optimal mixes.

7. In sum, the Airborne SIGINT Reconnaissance Review is, literally, nothing more than a descriptive "review" of previous efforts. It asserts without foundation that the size of the Airborne force is inadequate, and it supports a force of 12 modernized aircraft.

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8. Given the inadequacy of the review, there is considerable doubt about whether, and how, it should be used in conjunction with defense of the FY 1980 budget. OMB was provided advance copies of the review in conjunction with the budget review process, and their informal comments indicate their expected dissatisfaction. Perhaps it would be helpful to suggest to OMB that the review be used as a point of departure for a DCI-initiated cross-program, cross-service analysis. While the review is not helpful for guiding decisions on the RIVET JOINT force size and modernization, it does serve as clear evidence that the entire overhead reconnaissance issue lacks coherent analysis and management. **STOF**

9. To use the review's inadequacy as the rationale for deciding to hold the fleet at eight aircraft may be justifiable, but there are several factors which suggest that a decision to reduce the fleet should be deferred until 1981 or later. The TR-1 will not be available for operations until 1982, and that date could be delayed by either Congressional or Executive Department action. The Army's GUARDRAIL program has been reduced in scope, and the Navy's airborne fleet is nearing obsolescence with no upgrade or follow-on identified.

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Revised for a final analysis? → For the near-term, therefore, it would seem prudent to retain the existing fleet of 12 RIVET JOINTS. There is no reserve or civilian capability for crisis mobilization of additional aircraft. Additionally, SIGINT collection operators cannot be quickly mobilized to perform the airborne mission effectively; the operators require continuity in working with the signal environment in order to effectively select desired signals from a dense array of lower priority signals.

10. Given the present uncertainties, a decision on additional modernization could be deferred without risk, although there will be a cost penalty if it is decided later to continue modernization. The Program Manager and the Air Force should examine a strategy to minimize the impact of operating two different configurations, such as using a TGIF facility for ground processing of the tapes from the non-modernized aircraft (Block I).

11. As for the HPSC(I) requirement that the CCP manager, in conjunction with the Military Services, review the requirements for RIVET JOINT by 1 November, the DCI could inform the committee that the

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CCP manager has done so, but additional analysis is required to achieve the broader, Community perspective. The DCI could provide the 20 October review as an interim reply, with an explanation of the CCP manager's inherent limitations in conducting a simultaneous cross-program and cross-NFIP-IRA review.

12. In sum, the following course of action is recommended:

- (a) The DCI should take the lead in initiating a joint DoD/DCI cross-program, cross-NFIP-IRA review of all overhead reconnaissance requirements and systems. This effort should be tasked through the Secretary of Defense to an appropriate organization (such as the Joint Reconnaissance Force Steering Committee), with RMS and CT participation. ✓STOF
- (b) The 20 October review should be presented to OMB as evidence of the need for a Community-level analysis before making long-term decisions.
- (c) The fleet should be retained at 12 aircraft, (six modernized) based on the rationale that a decision to reduce the fleet should wait for clarification of the total overhead reconnaissance requirements, and to permit low-risk phasing with the IOC of new systems.
- (d) If further modernization is to be deferred, the Program Manager and the Air Force should be instructed to develop a strategy to minimize the impact of operating two different configurations.
- (e) The Review should be provided to the HPSC(I) as an interim response, with a request for additional time to complete a Community-level study.

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